

Jackson Township Files Complaint with Department of Justice over Religious Blockbusting

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JACKSON-Rob Nixon, president of the Jackson Township municipal council announced Tuesday night that the township has filed complaints with the Department of Justice and the New Jersey Attorney General over a block-busting style plan announced by Orthodox Jewish leaders in New York City.

Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, of Agudath Israel International, in November announced an edict to his congregation that they should consider buying all available land surrounding Lakewood in what he referred to as goy (non-jewish) neighborhoods. Lefkowitz told his congregation and other leaders they should buy all available housing units and land in order to "turn around" Jackson, Brick, Toms River and Howell, to expand the predominantly Orthodox enclave of Lakewood into surrounding communities.

In the months after the Rabbi's decree, land prospecting hit a feverish pace in Jackson and neighboring towns, leading to hundreds of harassment complaints from both Jewish and non-Jewish residents living in those communities. The pace of prospecting fever hit a breaking point in Jackson and Toms River which border Lakewood, forcing both towns to enact tougher door to door soliciting laws. Toms River Mayor Thomas Kelaher went as far as describing the land rush as an invasion, later through the township council, enacted cease and desist zones to prohibit all real estate door to door soliciting.

In Jackson, a tougher "no-knock" ordinance was enacted along with a landlord registration ordinance to regulate the sharp increase in rental properties owned by layers of limited liability corporation (LLC) protection.

Nixon said the township, after watching videos from Agudath Israel of America's 2016 leadership summit had enough evidence to formally acknowledge the practice as block busting and to lodge complaints at both the state and federal level.

Nixon described Jackson Township as a richly diverse community that welcomes all people, but said the idea of one group's goal of "turning around" the town was not acceptable. He added that he doesn't want to keep anyone from moving to Jackson, but added, Jackson Township does not need any turning around.

In a packed meeting room, residents expressed their concerns to Nixon and gave suggestions on what they would like to see happen in the township.

Nixon added that the threat can be eliminated if people held their ground and refused the offers being made on their properties and remain committed to Jackson Township and their neighbors. However, large sections of the town have begun the process of being "turned around" as entire neighborhoods have gone up for sale and homeowners fearing a future real estate collapse took offers from "Schtickler Pioneers" seeking to prospect for land in hopes that the eventual take over would lead to even higher land values, a process that took about 10 years in Lakewood, according to Lefkowitz.

For now, the township is at the mercy of the Department of Justice and the State of New Jersey. Whether or not an investigation will be conducted or if formal charges will be filed remains unknown.

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